

Testimony for Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Health

H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNium ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR

**By Carlos Reinoso Jr., Program Manager
The Governor's Partnership to Protect Connecticut's Workforce
DBA The Governor's Prevention Partnership
February 23, 2017**

Good afternoon, Senators Gerratana and Somers, Representative Dillon, and Representative Betts and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Carlos Reinoso Jr. and I am the Program Manager of Prevention Services and Partnerships at The Governor's Prevention Partnership.

I would like to share with you that I am also a **father, youth coach and youth mentor** so on behalf of fathers, parents, coaches and mentors, **I ask for your support to keep the state's prevention infrastructure intact so that our young people can grow and thrive in nurturing families and communities**

As many of you know, a sharp rise in opioid and heroin overdoses in Connecticut has been termed an epidemic by elected officials. The number of deaths has been rising every year—just 3 years ago we lost 327 people and last year over 800.

The Governor's Prevention Partnership is addressing this epidemic by providing prevention services for young people one city at a time. The Partnership has been doing prevention work for almost 30 years and raises private funds to match the state's investment in prevention. I'd like to provide a recent example. This year, we created a new model that is culturally responsive to the Hispanic/Latino community in Hartford and will eventually be rolled out statewide.

The need for prevention services among Hispanic/Latino Youth

Like other cities in the state, has a diverse population of whom 43% (or 54,000) are Hispanic/Latino descent. Latino youth living in Hartford are at higher risk of substance abuse compared to their peers in suburban areas and in most cases compared to other youth in the city itself. They have a higher rate of use for methamphetamines, marijuana, alcohol, MDMA and inhalant. Most alarming is that nearly 16% of Latino students report they drank alcohol and 8% report they used marijuana before the age of 13 and

Hispanic/Latino youth living in Hartford, CT. are at risk of substance abuse compared to their peers in suburban areas and, in most cases, compared to other youth (Black or White) in the city itself. According to the Connecticut Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 2015, Hispanic/Latino high school students have higher substance use rates than their peers for methamphetamines, marijuana, alcohol, MDMA and inhalants. The Hispanic Health Council researchers have affirmed that drug use in Hartford is extensive and that as many as 4,000-5,000 Latino adults and youth use drugs that include alcohol, marijuana, opiates and heroin.

A New Approach

The Governor's Prevention Partnership, in collaboration with our partner Family Life Education is rolling out a multi-tiered project that includes (1) raising awareness through an effective, culturally responsive public awareness campaign, (2) parent workshops and support groups in a community café style to educate and connect parents about specific issues that include talking with children about drugs and alcohol, and what to do when a child has already begun using substances, etc., and (3) identification of high-risk youth and referral for services including tutoring, mentoring, after-school enrichment activities, case management and behavioral health and mental health services.

As described, there is an urgent need for cohesive, accessible, community-based strategies to help prevent early substance abuse among Hispanic/Latino youth and their families before it progresses to heroin and/or opioid use later on. The Partnership has developed an effective approach, tools, and evaluation data that can one day be packaged, shared and ultimately replicated with other communities in the state.

Our children are our future—our growing Latino population and all of our children deserve to grow up safe and drug-free. As we continue to face an economic environment in Connecticut that necessitates cuts in services to children and families, I urge you to keep the prevention infrastructure intact. Prevention isn't free, but it is cost effective, especially since we are committed to raising private dollars through corporations and foundations to match the state's funding, doubling the impact of our services.

In my community, I am devoted to sports and all I can do to promote the health and well being of our young people. My vision for the new program I described is to bring it to scale so that **every school, every community group and every family feels supported and every child is connected.**

Thank you for your continued support of our prevention initiatives.

Thank you,

Carlos Reinoso Jr.

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